

CROSSING WILD TYPES INTO FANCY GUPPIES © Anthony Fischinger

A few years back I had trouble keeping IFGA show strains alive upon re-entering the hobby after a long absence. In desperation I decided to try selectively breeding some feeders and then using the best males crossed into IFGA type females. I tried wild type fish crossed into snakeskins, grass, and micariffe type females. Out of these few crosses I got no less than a dozen different types I could have probably fixed if I had the tank space. I have a lot more patience than tank space and go against common practice by usually raising different drops of fry of approximately the same age together to maximize what I can do with my tanks. I also wanted lines with showy females, so I used females with color in the crosses. Aside from the snakes and grass bicolors/multis,

I got mosaics, medusas, galaxies, solid snakes, red bicolors, blue green bicolors, purple bicolors, bronzes, micariffe yellows and tequila sunrises. Of those fish I have kept several types of nice multis and bicolors and the fish I am most excited about, gold bodied non albino pastels. I went from no strains and hardly any fry to too many in a less than a year. I finally settled on working 2 types of snakes and some bicolors that throw both purple and green variants of the same strain as well as grass multis and some multis that look sort of like golden moscovs. You might make a few mistakes matching males to females after your crosses, just make a best guess which females look most like the corresponding males and go with it. After 2 years I had some fish that were decent enough to show and I am still working them hard to improve them all. You need to go at least 4 generations to really be sure you aren't going to discard a gem that finally segregates out from the crosses (my pastels didn't really appear til about 4 generations out from the original crosses, the micariffe types also didn't re-appear until 4 generations out.) It is true that most crosses in the first generation don't produce better fish than the parents, but if you are patient and take things out a few generations, all the while culling hard and selecting only the best, I think you will be rewarded with at least one nice new strain and possibly more. A byproduct of making crosses is you will get lots of fry to work with, fertility will be increased. The vast majority of the fish will be junk the first few generations, at least in the early stages numbers help, sifting through and selecting the best one percent or less to select breeders from is the key. All you need is a few good ones to use as breeders every generation to make steady improvements. I am very excited to have pastels that are not half black and are as hardy and prolific as any of my other strains. There are lots of IFGA classes that receive no or few entries because nobody has kept them alive over time, and as a result they are not available for sale anywhere. The classes aren't necessarily lost forever, and some are very pretty fish, the empty IFGA classes can be reconstituted by making crosses and selecting and fixing some of the unusual fish that result. I am pretty sure a lot of those currently unpopulated classes came about because crosses many years ago happened to produce some nice strains that became popular enough to have their own niches to compete in. I feel that guppies are a living art form that can be manipulated by their breeders to suit their ideals of beauty. (and I feel that the IFGA deltas are beautiful, many fall short of the ideal, but BOS fish would be almost universally accepted as beautiful.) The standards are an ideal to work the fish's conformation towards, but in the variegated/bicolor/multi and AOC classes there is opportunity for artistic license to create your own unique living jewels at least from a standpoint of color and pattern. My point is, crossing selected wilds into IFGA strains can help us remake strains that are no longer available except possibly through convincing the one or two people that still have them to give some up, as well as the creation of unique and exciting strains. If a half dozen people committed to fishroom projects like this the hobby could be reinvigorated and exciting new strains will appear on the show bench in a few years. Bryan Chin has an article on the RMGA website about his wild type crosses, and while he ultimately discarded the males, he did work some of the females back into his existing strains. I think he has some of the nicest fish out there and has real talent at breeding and selecting guppies. I hope to someday talk to him about guppies, I really like his fish....

How to pre-select wild types for crossing into IFGA fish

Wild types can be successfully be crossed to IFGA strains and the results worked towards decent IFGA standards within a few years. The resulting fish will compete in some of the variegated/bicolor/multi classes that aren't getting many show entries, and some really nice and exquisitely colored veils will also likely result as you try to work the fish towards deltas over time. The early guppy legends worked on improving wild type fish for years to finally get veiltails, which were a sensation in the 1950's !!! Now the delta genes are out there and a wild cross if done properly can produce your own unique variegated strain in a relatively short time, you can have at least a few showable fish in a couple years. A bonus is that the offspring will likely be easy to keep alive and healthy.

It is important to pre select your wild type fish for a few generations in order to get the best conformation and finnage as soon as possible after the crosses to IFGA fish are made. This is good cheap practice for newbies, it makes it easy to learn to cull since some or most of the wild type feeder fish will just look awful at first, and you won't feel much guilt getting rid of them. One of the hardest lessons to learn in keeping good guppies is learning to be ruthless in your culling, and it is best to learn that lesson early. I suggest a single 29 gal or larger tank for this purpose, a 55 is ideal. What I did was buy about 20 bucks worth of feeders from several local sources, close to 200 fish total. It helps if the store will allow you to net your own, they wouldn't let me, so I had to buy bunches... Feeder tanks are typically horrendously overcrowded and filthy, with a lot of sick and dying fish. I got rid of any swords, pintails, doubleswords, etc right at the start. Any unhealthy fish also got tossed, but no real effort was made to isolate sick fish from the healthy. I think it is important in any breeding program to select for fish that are less susceptible to stress and disease than their tankmates. Keep the wild ones separate from your other fish, preferably in a different room, and don't use the same nets or equipment on your IFGA fish at least until after you have first generation fish from the crosses.

Feeders will look horrible and hopeless when you first get them due to the horrible conditions they are kept in, but they will make rapid improvement and in less than a year you will have fish that are ready to work into your lines. I did treat the new arrivals assuming they had all sorts of worms and parasites. (Prazipro, de-los, then a one hour bath in a bucket containing 5ml of 3% hydrogen peroxide per gallon, and then de-worming and metronidazole flake foods.) I selected the largest healthiest relatively stocky looking females and those with the widest caudal angles, a lot of the feeders have very narrow caudal angles and skinny bodies, but it still pays to select those few fish with the best caudal angles and stoutest bodies to improve the next generation. Males were selected for the absence of swords and for color, I guess the best approximated a poor but symmetrical flagtail as far as caudals go and a few fish with the best dorsals were also selected. At this point shinyness, color and relative absence of black spots became part of the selection criteria. I whittled the original 200 down to maybe a dozen of the best adults within a week, sitting in front of the tank and netting them out one by one. By then I had a hundred new fry in the tank with the adults. The vast majority of the original fish had some type of sword or otherwise asymmetrical caudal. If not eliminated before making your crosses to IFGA fish, the swords and asymmetrical caudals will come back to haunt you.

The dull, pitiful feeders improved dramatically within a couple generations, I probably sorted through a thousand fish (most culled early, as soon as I saw bad caudals, so I really raised only the best), a lot of them in a 55 gal drum, netting them out every month or so to cull. I culled heavily. In less than a year I had about a half dozen impressively colored males and an equal number of the best females to experiment with. The original malnourished fish were mostly silvery and had just a few spots of color, but the genetics were there for great color once they were better fed. The males nearly doubled in size over a year from the tiny originals. I selected for the most green and purple in the population, but could have gone for red or blue instead, as there were some fish I could have worked

into that direction. That probably was about the top one percent of the fish after a year that were used to make my crosses into delta fish. Often when feeders are directly crossed into IFGA fish without being pre-selected, you get all sorts of nasty surprises like vestigial swords and horribly shaped caudals that make the crosses not worth the trouble. It is much better to try to eliminate the sword type tails first. I got better results crossing the wild males into delta female strains than the other way around, but your results may vary. I crossed IFGA males into wild females many years ago and wasn't happy with those fish, so this time I used wild males into fancy females, (or wild males to F1 females from a fancy male to wild female cross), but all the selected females were fertilized by the best wild type males. The females contributed most of the color and the improved caudals to the descendants. Even in the first generation cross, I got some fish on the veil/delta border, over time I am selecting them towards the delta ideal and they are improving but still throwing some veils. Dorsals actually improved easier than the caudals, a few of the wilds actually had fairly long dorsals before crossing into the delta fish, I expected that the dorsals would be much more difficult, maybe I just got lucky. The strains I am working are still not finished products I am fully satisfied with, but are improving and throwing at least a few percent decent show fish that look different than most others on the bench.

I was planning on keeping the wilds in a colony tank for future crosses but lost them to a heron that ate them all out of the livestock tank they were living in. I had just netted them all out, culled them, saved the best dozen, gave the tank a quick scrubbing when I dumped it to cut down on the algae before returning them to the tank. With nowhere to hide, a damned heron ate every last one of them the next day... I will have to start again pre-selecting some wilds for future crosses now, it was fun the first time and will be fun again in the future.

Website Note: Author is US based and so fish descriptions, standards etc may be different to the UK

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